

PRIVATE PROPERTY

by Andrew Morrison

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“THIS IS PRIVATE PROPERTY”

As skaters, that's something we hear all the time: "This is private property." The implication, of course, is that we're not supposed to be skating there. We don't own that land, and the owner doesn't want people skateboarding there. We live in a society that holds private property sacred. When it is invoked, it is supposed to resolve all questions or debate about what the proper use of a piece of land is. It is whatever the owner deems it to be.

One of the good things about skateboarding is that it makes us question, to some extent, whether private property is the immutable law it is presented to us as. "Never stop hopping fences," as the shirt goes. Skaters don't see arbitrary lines, we just see spots and want to skate them. The hallowed "skater's eye" and all that. Hopefully that eye allows us to see how other uses - like protesting or being unhoused or not being white - are also policed under the mandate of private property.

Indeed, as puckish as it might be to transgress upon private property for our own fun, if we really want to follow that line of questioning to its end, we might end up asking how the spots we're being ushered out of became privately owned in the first place. The answer - theft, displacement, deception - is pretty bleak.

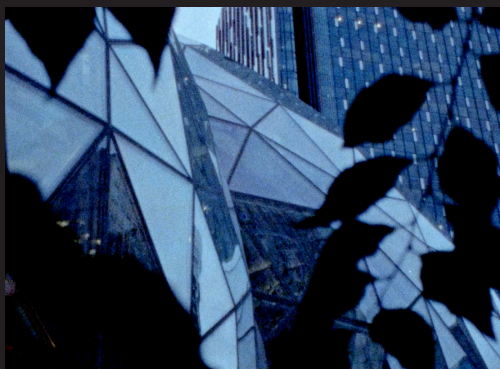
To wit, the Duwamish Tribe, whose lands we're all skating, taking photographs, making art, protesting and existing on, is denied federal recognition to this day. Despite the fact that our city is quite literally named after their chief, the Department of the Interior says they did not constitute a proper tribal entity at the proper period in history. It's not just the police that the state uses to do its dirty work, of course. Bureaucrats have blood on their hands too.

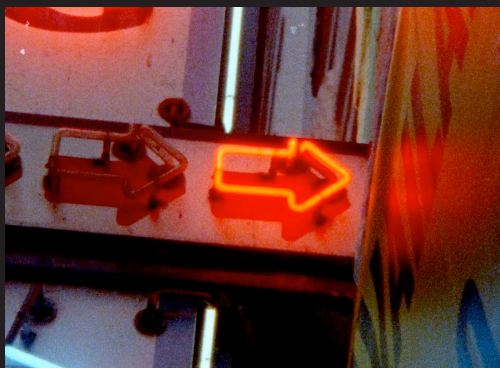
And while the private property we're skating on was maybe built, bought or sold only a year ago, it's all the same dirt at the end of the day. The Duwamish tribe lives and thrives here and yet they've been denied federal recognition, which provides access to a ton of essential resources. That is the absolute bare minimum our nation owes them. Despite being a Treaty Tribe from the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855, the U.S. still refuses to acknowledge their sovereignty. No mayor of Seattle has ever met with the tribe's chairwoman, Cecile Hansen, during her thirty year tenure. It's plainly and obviously bullshit, and meanwhile we blithely carry on like Amazon's big glass balls and the exorbitant profits that built them are the most normal thing in the world. The latter would not exist without the former.

What we're getting at is that, as much as skateboarding is totally badass and the ultimate act of youthful rebellion and all that, it's just not enough anymore. You can't skate and consider yourself to be automatically countercultural or progressive. It is still a good first step, a prompt to ask "Why is society so wrong about so many things?" But once you ask, and start getting those uncomfortable answers, you've gotta act.

To that end, we're donating 100% of the proceeds of this video and zine to Real Rent Duwamish, as both a territorial acknowledgement and a fuck you to the idea of private property. We know we can't put the genie back in the bottle at this point - we seem to be stuck with capitalism until it collapses - but we think it's absolutely unconscionable that the people whose lands we seized so our little experiment could succeed are not at least sharing in that success.

It might not be much - we're just a bunch of broke skaters, after all - but giving material resources back to the Duwamish tribe feels like something real and hopeful we can do. To be able to do it with our art, words, photos, and skating feels even better. Thank you for buying this video/zine and, to the Duwamish, thank you for letting us skate your land.







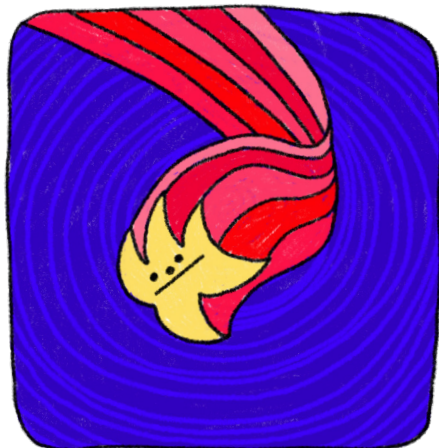
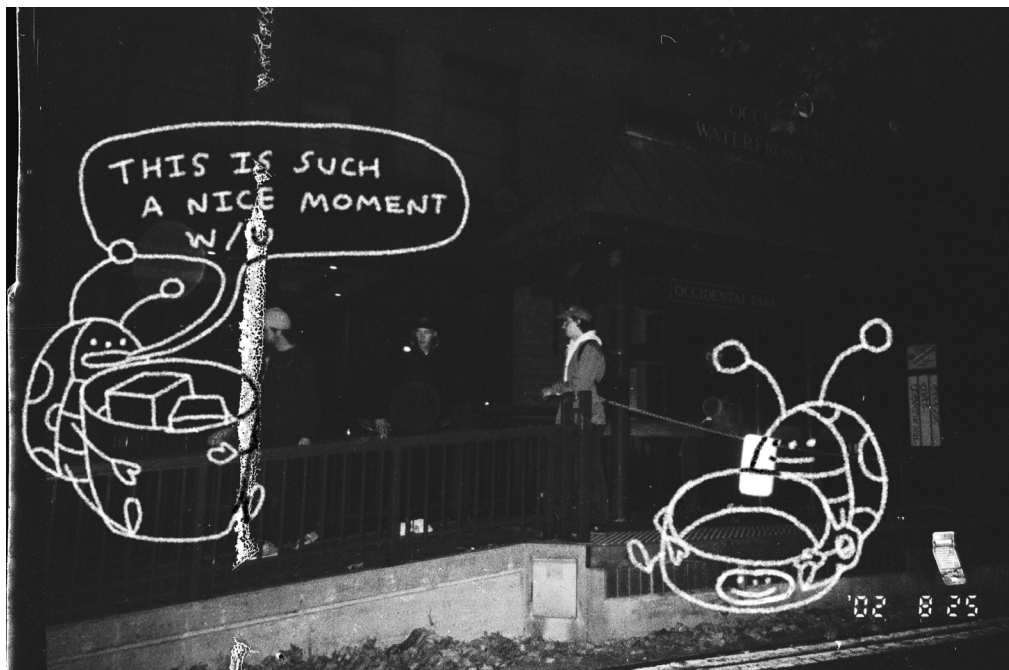


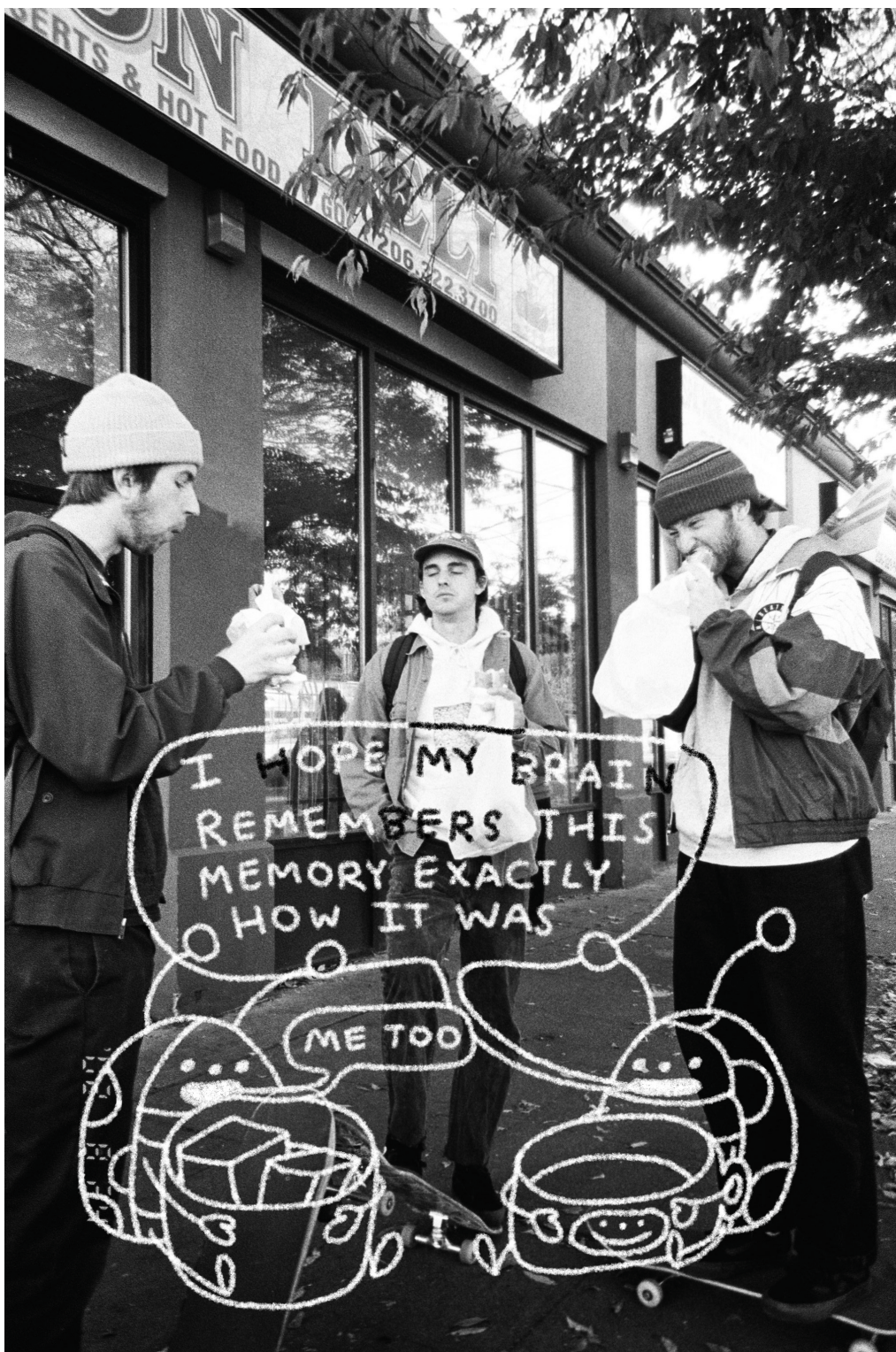








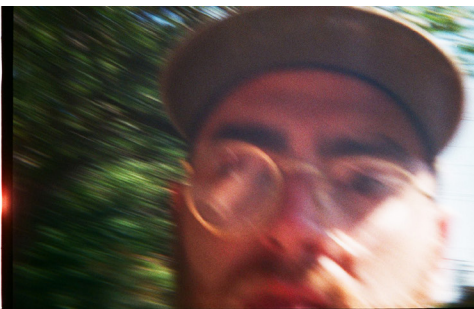
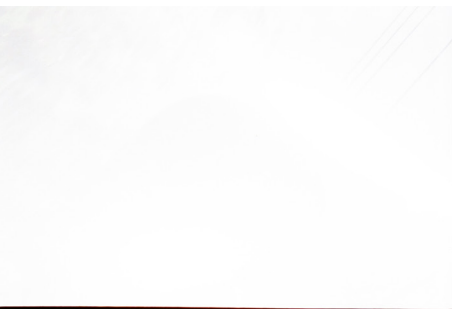






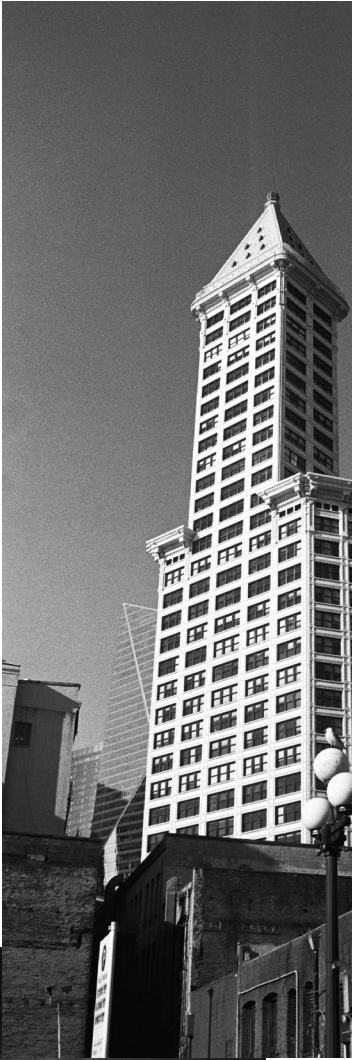


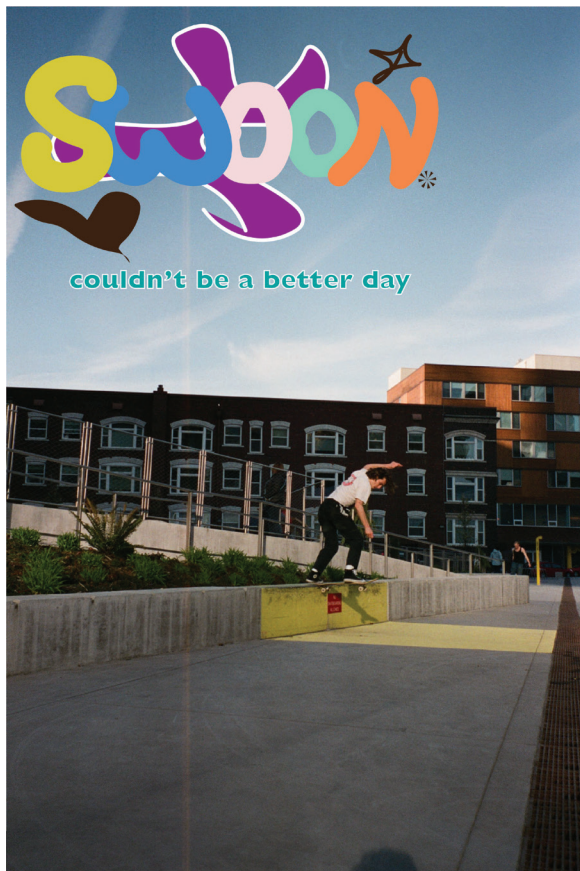






























a video by
Alex Cooper



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A WESTLAKE STORY

Much of the video that this zine was born out of was filmed at Westlake Center. Much of Seattle's skate history, at least with regards to street skating, was inscribed on the granite ground at Westlake, from Jordan Woodworth's timeless sponsor me tape, "Requiem for Some Flow," to Michael Patterson's mind-bending part that just dropped on Thrasher.

This all makes sense, as it is perhaps the closest thing Seattle has to a proper plaza spot, a la Love Park or MACBA. Like any good plaza spot, it has a plethora of low-impact granite obstacles, plenty of open flatground, and a central location that boasts easy access via transit. In the '90s, it was a true paradise, with Pine Street closed off to vehicle traffic between 4th and 5th Avenues, and the massive stage skateable in its full splendor. Imagine, if you can, a Seattle in which you can take any bus from any neighborhood to downtown, at any time of night, and find a perfect 25' long ledge and a whole gang of people to skate it with. Beats the hell out of meeting at the Cal Anderson courts and skating disintegrating wooden pallets, doesn't it?

Now, I might be exaggerating the glory of Auld Westlake, as I've only been skating this city for twenty years, and only started putting in hours at Westlake after they'd skatestopped the stage ledge, but I think it's safe to say that there has been a steady and systematic decline in the Westlake experience. And with words like "they" and "systematic," I mean that the powers that be have done everything in their power, since they first realized skaters liked to skate Westlake, to make it an unwelcoming place for us.





After the long ledge got capped, skaters shifted their focus to the Starbucks ledges across the street, and the small ledges that form the corner of the pedestal for Westlake's magnificent fountain.

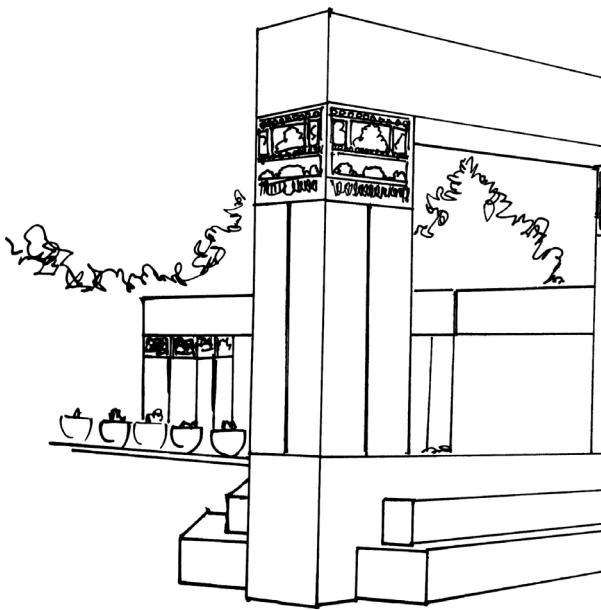
To keep us off those, the city (and in the case of Starbucks's, the mall management) has used everything from conventional skatestoppers to embedded ones to strange rough strips to, weirdly enough, pushing planters onto the edge of the ledge and strapping them together with metal tubing. That last one ended up being more of a fun hippie jump than anything else, but to what lengths they've gone! I've even forgot to mention the fact that, after they tired of us skating around the last skatestopper on the long ledge, they mounted an entire planter over the street side of the stage, effectively getting rid of skateboarders and lounging Juggalos in one fell swoop. This month, after a long run of good times on the fountain ledge, they've done a new round of conventional stoppers, with the screws so brazed and twisted up as to require an acetylene torch and sawzall for removal. In the midst of a global pandemic and an apocalyptic smoke cloud, shutting out skateboarders is still a priority.

Why? Why make such a Herculean effort to rid Westlake of skaters? Some scholars, Iain Borden chief among them, have posited that skaters actually promote safety in otherwise dangerous areas of the city. He famously called us the "shock troops of gentrification." Ouch, but if you've spent much time downtown after the bars close, you know he ain't wrong. Skaters are far and away the friendliest people you're going to meet at Westlake at 3am. So why does the city so desperately want us out?

The answer, fittingly enough for this zine, is rooted in private property. This might sound like a stretch, as Westlake is technically a public park, but it's been managed by the Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) since 2016. The DSA is a business-funded lobbying group that exists to support center right candidates in city council and mayoral elections, demonize the unhoused, and police behavior in the downtown core.

To illustrate my point, which to be specific is that the average American's deeply conditioned reverence for private property is so powerful that it has usurped the idea that public property exists for public good, their activities coordinator kicked us out other day by telling us to get out of "his" park. At the time, I was shocked, but upon reflection I suppose he's right. Our city, with probably very little public knowledge, has ceded management of many of its downtown parks to a privately funded lobbying organization. They call the shots now.

Predictably, the shots they call are with the aim of making downtown more business friendly. The DSA, as evidenced by the existence of an activities coordinator, plans lots of fun, family friendly activities for the park (they do not, as he falsely and weirdly claimed to us, organize free skate events in the park). But, despite being described as "the city's town square," on Seattle.gov, the park's primary purpose is clear: to aid commerce. The city's website lauds the park as "the perfect spot to take a break and admire the fountain, or watch shoppers as they visit the Westlake Mall and the surrounding retail stores." Though street vending of the type common in so many bigger, busier cities is banned, food trucks are welcomed in, so long as they are of the aesthetically pleasing, well-capitalized variety. You'll never see any of White Center's taco trucks at Westlake, that's for sure. While it is not a place for skating or sleeping, it is very much an amenity for office workers in search of an outdoor lunch. It is, during healthier times, almost completely shut down every year to make way for a massive (and expensive) carousel ride, placing the Christian holiday tradition right where it belongs: next to a mall.



To be sure, we skateboarders are still privileged little Peter Pans, and when a DSA functionary or a cop or any other agent of capitalism kicks us out, it's ultimately no harm done. But what I find so troubling about it is that it is representative of a system that denies the fact that human society is messy and complicated and, well, human. It demands a perfectly sanitized downtown core, amenable only to moneyed shoppers and diners, and free of such unsightly things as panhandlers, hawkers, and skateboarders.

I don't know that there is anywhere in the capitalist West where an alternative vision truly exists, but I do know that many of the European cities we so idolize here in Seattle do not see skateboarding as such a nuisance. They build skateboarding spaces into the city's parks and streets, or at least allow it to occur there naturally, with the specific aim of making things more lively. Cities should, if nothing

else, be lively! Moreover, the cities that have embraced skateboarding – Malmö, most prominently – are in countries where social aid is emphasized, not ignored. Sweden is reviled by the right (including our boy Pat Duffy!) for embracing and supporting so many migrants, but to me it's a sign that they understand the basic fact that civil society's whole purpose is to promote the public good. The Brits, who Americans are still most similar to by temperament, resisted South Bank as a skate spot for a long time, but even they came around. Now it's part of the thriving waterfront walk on the Thames' south side, one more attraction for gawkers on their way to the Great Eye.

I would love for Seattle to be such a city. I would love to see us make good on our long-forgotten Ten Year Skatepark plan, which called for "skatedots" in public parks across the city. I would love to see Westlake and Occidental Park turned into open air service centers for the many, many unhoused people in this city. Certainly my complaint that we spend so much time partitioning skateboarding away from public

spaces rather than integrating it into them is kind of frivolous. But ultimately it represents an attitudinal issue that Seattle has never, in my many decades of living here, addressed. It is a very American issue, of course, but I see Seattle as one of the country's most egregious examples of it: we have no sense of the public good.

Our city is only for the privileged, despite being home to many of the most under-privileged people American capitalism has ever produced. We don't want safe injection sites in our neighborhood or our downtown parks because we don't want to pay a small price (being in proximity to people suffering from drug addiction) for a large public good (safety and services

for drug users, fewer needles on our streets). We would rather spend our money sweeping the unhoused instead of housing them. We cower in fear of offending Amazon, rather than addressing the very serious changes their presence has made to quality of life for working class people in the city. We fuck the many on behalf of the few.

Westlake is where so much of this has played out, and continues to. From the Occupy protests, which filled the park with unhoused folks in tents, to the recent explosion of fury over George Floyd's murder, to the back and forth we skateboarders have had over the years, it's all there on display, downtown. The business community would like nothing more than to make it disappear. But, as evidenced by the fact that some enterprising individual knocked the new caps off before we could even make it to print, skateboarding, like many of society's undesirable byproducts, can't be swept under the rug.

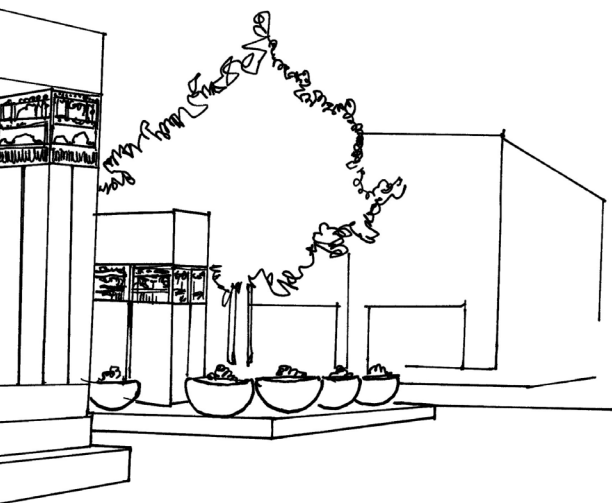
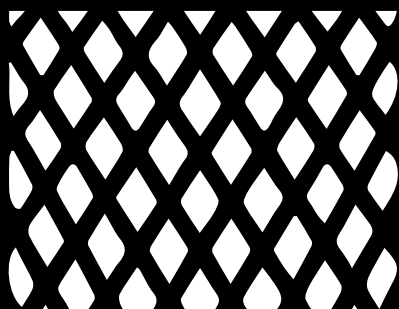
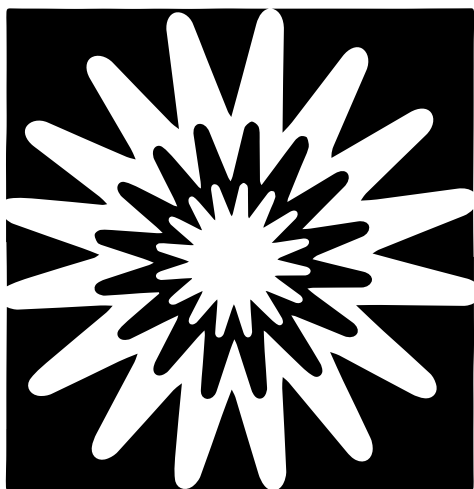


Illustration by Nhon Nguyen @nhon120_d

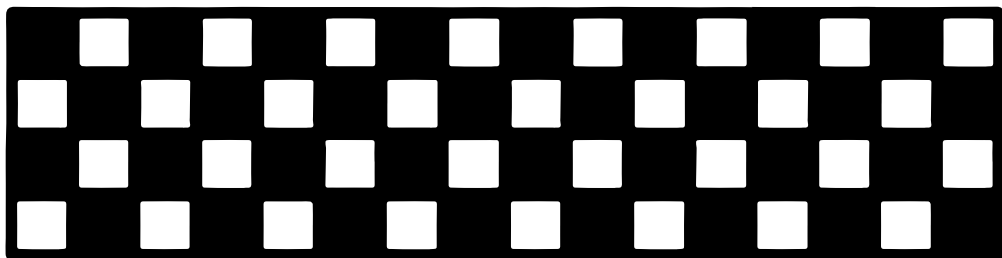
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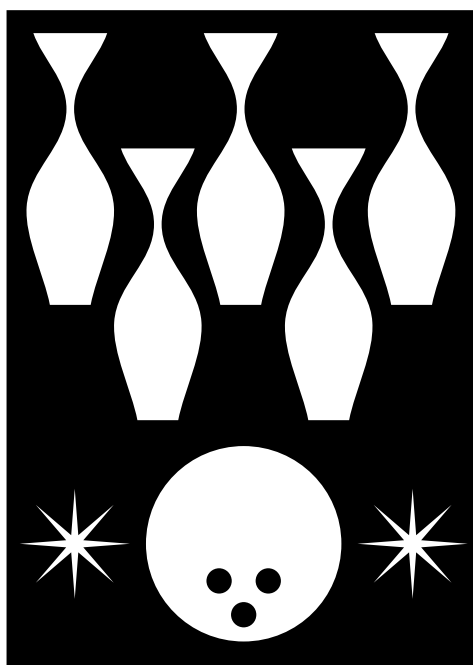
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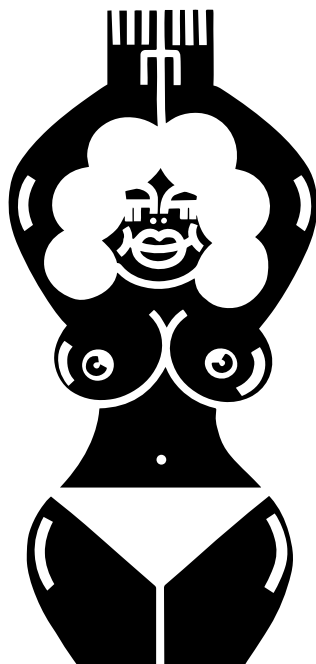
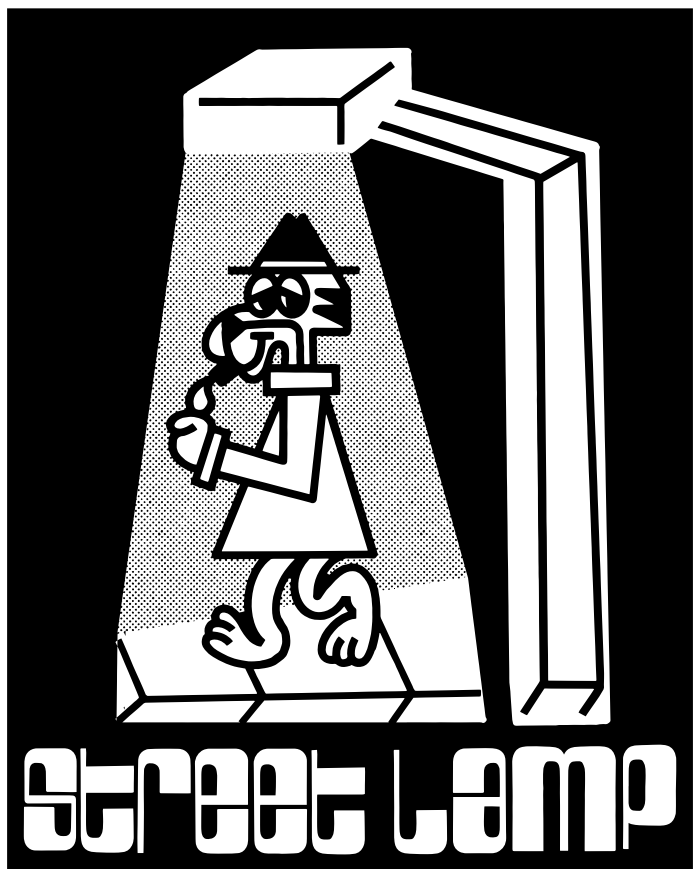


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